

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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IS HE POPENJOY ?

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER XII. MISS MILDMAY AND JACK DE BARON.

LADY GEORGE was not left long in her new house without visitors. Early on the day after her arrival, Mrs. Houghton came to her, and began at once, with great volubility, to explain how the land lay, and to suggest how it should be made to lie for the future.

"I am so glad you have come. As soon, you know, as they positively forbade me to get on horseback again this winter, I made up my mind to come to town. What is there to keep me down there if I don't ride? I promised to obey if I was brought here—and to disobey if I was left there. Mr. Houghton goes up and down, you know. It is hard upon him, poor old fellow. But then the other thing would be harder on me. He and papa are together somewhere now, arranging about the spring meetings. They have got their stables joined, and I know very well who will have the best of that. A man has to get up very early to see all round papa. But Mr. Houghton is so rich, it doesn't signify. And now, my dear, what are you going to do? and what is Lord George going to do? I am dying to see Lord George. I daresay you are getting a little tired of him by this time."

"Indeed, I'm not."

"You haven't picked up courage enough yet to say so; that's it, my dear. I've brought cards from Mr. Houghton, which means to say that though he is down somewhere at Newmarket in the flesh, he is to be supposed to have called upon you

and Lord George. And now we want you both to come and dine with us on Monday. I know Lord George is particular, and so I've brought a note. You can't have anything to do yet, and of course you'll come. Houghton will be back on Sunday, and goes down again on Tuesday morning. To hear him talk about it you'd think he was the keenest man in England across a country. Say that you'll come."

"I'll ask Lord George."

"Fiddle-de-dee. Lord George will be only too delighted to come and see me. I've got such a nice cousin to introduce to you; not one of the Germain sort, you know, who are all perhaps a little slow. This man is Jack De Baron, a nephew of papa's. He's in the Coldstreams, and I do think you'll like him. There's nothing on earth he can't do, from waltzing down to polo. And old Mildmay will be there, and Guss Mildmay, who is dying in love with Jack."

"And is Jack dying in love with Guss?"

"Oh dear no! not a bit. You needn't be afraid. Jack De Baron has just five hundred a year and his commission, and must, I should say, be over head and ears in debt. Miss Mildmay may perhaps have five thousand for her fortune. Put this and that together, and you can hardly see anything comfortable in the way of matrimony, can you?"

"Then I fear your—Jack—is mercenary."

"Mercenary? of course he's mercenary. That is to say, he doesn't want to go to destruction quite at one leap. But he's awfully fond of falling in love, and when he is in love he'll do almost anything—except marry."

"Then, if I were you, I shouldn't ask—Guss—to meet him."

"She can fight her own battles, and wouldn't thank me at all if I were to fight them for her after that fashion. There'll be nobody else except Houghton's sister, Hetta. You never met Hetta Houghton?"

"I've heard of her."

"I should think so. 'Not to know her'—I forget the words; but if you don't know Hetta Houghton, you're just nowhere. She has lots of money, and lives all alone, and says whatever comes uppermost, and does what she pleases. She goes everywhere, and is up to everything. I always made up my mind I wouldn't be an old maid, but I declare I envy Hetta Houghton. But then she'd be nothing unless she had money. There'll be eight of us, and at this time of the year we dine at half-past seven, sharp. Can I take you anywhere? The carriage can come back with you."

"Thank you, no. I am going to pick Lord George up at the Carlton at four."

"How nice! I wonder how long you'll go on picking up Lord George at the Carlton."

She could only suppose, when her friend was gone, that this was the right kind of thing. No doubt Lady Susanna had warned her against Mrs. Houghton, but then she was not disposed to take Lady Susanna's warnings on any subject. Her father had known that she intended to know the woman; and her father, though he had cautioned her very often as to the old women at Manor Cross, as he called them, had never spoken a word of caution to her as to Mrs. Houghton. And her husband was well aware of the intended intimacy.

She picked up her husband, and rather liked being kept waiting a few minutes at the club-door in her brougham. Then they went together to look at a new picture, which was being exhibited by gaslight in Bond Street, and she began to feel that the pleasures of London were delightful.

"Don't you think those two old priests are magnificent?" she said, pressing on his arm, in the obscurity of the darkened chamber.

"I don't know that I care much about old priests," said Lord George.

"But the heads are so fine."

"I daresay. Sacerdotal pictures never please me. Didn't you say you wanted

to go to Swan and Edgar's?" He would not sympathise with her about pictures, but perhaps she would be able to find out his taste at last.

He seemed quite well satisfied to dine with the Houghtons, and did, in fact, call at the house before that day came round. "I was in Berkeley-square this morning," he said one day, "but I didn't find any one."

"Nobody ever is at home, I suppose," she said. "Look here. There have been Lady Brabazon, and Mrs. Patmore Green, and Mrs. Montacute Jones. Who is Mrs. Montacute Jones?"

"I never heard of her."

"Dear me; how very odd. I daresay it was kind of her to come. And yesterday the Countess of Care called. Is not she some relative?"

"She is my mother's first cousin."

"And then there was dear old Miss Tallowax. And I wasn't at home to see one of them."

"No one, I suppose, ever is at home in London, unless they fix a day for seeing people."

Lady George, having been specially asked to come "sharp" to her friend's dinner-party, arrived with her husband exactly at the hour named, and found no one in the drawing-room. In a few minutes Mrs. Houghton hurried in, apologising. "It's all Mr. Houghton's fault indeed, Lord George. He was to have been in town yesterday, but would stay down and hunt to-day. Of course the train was late, and of course he was so tired that he couldn't dress without going to sleep first." As nobody else came for a quarter of an hour Mrs. Houghton had an opportunity of explaining some things. "Has Mrs. Montacute Jones called? I suppose you were out of your wits to find out who she was. She's a very old friend of papa's, and I asked her to call. She gives awfully swell parties, and has no end of money. She was one of the Montacutes of Montacute, and so she sticks her own name on to her husband's. He's alive, I believe, but he never shows. I think she keeps him somewhere down in Wales."

"How odd!"

"It is a little queer, but when you come to know her you'll find it will make no difference. She's the ugliest old woman in London, but I'd be as ugly as she is to have her diamonds."

"I wouldn't," said Mary.

"Your husband cares about your appearance," said Mrs. Houghton, turning her eyes upon Lord George. He simpered and looked pleased, and did not seem to be at all disgusted by their friend's slang, and yet, had his wife talked of "awfully swell" parties, he would, she was well aware, have rebuked her seriously.

Miss Houghton—Hetta Houghton—was the first to arrive, and she somewhat startled Mary by the gorgeous glories of her dress, though Mrs. Houghton afterwards averred that she wasn't "a patch upon Mrs. Montacute Jones." But Miss Houghton was a lady, and though over forty years of age, was still handsome.

"Been hunting to-day, has he?" she said. "Well, if he likes it, I shan't complain. But I thought he liked his ease too well, to travel fifty miles up to town after riding about all day."

"Of course he's knocked up, and at his age it's quite absurd," said the young wife. "But, Hetta, I want you to know my particular friend, Lady George Germain. Lord George, if he'll allow me to say so, is a cousin, though I'm afraid we have to go back to Noah to make it out."

"Your great-grandmother was my great-grandmother's sister. That's not so very far off."

"When you get to grandmothers no fellow can understand it, can they, Mary?" Then came Mr. and Miss Mildmay. He was a gray-haired old gentleman, rather short and rather fat, and she looked to be just such another girl as Mrs. Houghton herself had been, though blessed with more regular beauty. She was certainly handsome, but she carried with her that wearied air of being nearly worn out by the toil of searching for a husband, which comes upon some young women after the fourth or fifth year of their labours. Fortune had been very hard upon Augusta Mildmay. Early in her career she had fallen in love, while abroad, with an Italian nobleman, and had immediately been carried off home by her anxious parents. Then in London she had fallen in love again with an English nobleman, an eldest son, with wealth of his own. Nothing could be more proper, and the young man had fallen also in love with her. All her friends were beginning to hate her with virulence, so lucky had she been, when, on a sudden, the young lord told her that the match would not please his father and mother, and that therefore there must be an end of it. What was there to be done?

All London had talked of it, all London must know the utter failure. Nothing more cruel, more barefaced, more unjust, had ever been perpetrated. A few years since all the Mildmays in England, one after another, would have had a shot at the young nobleman. But in these days there seems to be nothing for a girl to do but to bear it and try again. So Augusta Mildmay bore it, and did try again; tried very often again. And now she was in love with Jack De Baron. The worst of Guss Mildmay was that, through it all, she had a heart, and would like the young men—would like them, or perhaps dislike them, equally to her disadvantage. Old gentlemen, such as was Mr. Houghton, had been willing to condone all her faults, and all her loves, and to take her as she was. But when the moment came, she would not have her Houghton, and then she was in the market again. Now a young woman entering the world cannot make a greater mistake than not to know her own line, or, knowing it, not to stick to it. Those who are thus weak are sure to fall between two stools. If a girl chooses to have a heart, let her marry the man of her heart, and take her mutton-chops and bread and cheese, her stuff gown and her six children, as they may come. But if she can decide that such horrors are horrid to her, and that they must at any cost be avoided, then let her take her Houghton when he comes, and not hark back upon feelings and fancies, upon liking and loving, upon youth and age. If a girl has money and beauty too, of course she can pick and choose. Guss Mildmay had no money to speak of, but she had beauty enough to win either a working barrister or a rich old sinner. She was quite able to fall in love with the one and flirt with the other at the same time; but when the moment for decision came, she could not bring herself to put up with either. At present she was in real truth in love with Jack De Baron, and had brought herself to think that if Jack would ask her, she would risk everything. But were he to do so, which was not probable, she would immediately begin to calculate what could be done by Jack's moderate income and her own small fortune. She and Mrs. Houghton kissed each other affectionately, being at the present moment close in each other's confidences, and then she was introduced to Lady George. "Adelaide hasn't a chance," was Miss Mildmay's first thought as she looked at the young wife.

Then came Jack De Baron. Mary was much interested in seeing a man of whom she had heard so striking an account, and for the love of whom she had been told that a girl was almost dying. Of course all that was to be taken with many grains of salt; but still the fact of the love and the attractive excellence of the man had been impressed upon her. She declared to herself at once that his appearance was very much in his favour, and a fancy passed across her mind that he was somewhat like that ideal man of whom she herself had dreamed, ever so many years ago as it seemed to her now, before she had made up her mind that she would change her ideal and accept Lord George Germain. He was about the middle height, light-haired, broad-shouldered, with a pleasant smiling mouth and well-formed nose; but, above all, he had about him that pleasure-loving look, that appearance of taking things jauntily, and of enjoying life, which she in her young girlhood had regarded as being absolutely essential to a pleasant lover. There are men whose very eyes glance business, whose every word imports care, who step as though their shoulders were weighted with thoughtfulness, who breathe solicitude, and who seem to think that all the things of life are too serious for smiles. Lord George was such a man, though he had in truth very little business to do. And then there are men who are always playfellows with their friends, who—even should misfortune be upon them—still smile and make the best of it, who come across one like sunbeams, and who, even when tears are falling, produce the tints of a rainbow. Such a one Mary Lovelace had perhaps seen in her childhood, and had then dreamed of. Such a one was Jack De Baron, at any rate to the eye.

And such a one in truth he was. Of course the world had spoiled him. He was in the Guards. He was fond of pleasure. He was fairly well off in regard to all his own wants, for his cousin had simply imagined those debts with which ladies are apt to believe that young men of pleasure must be overwhelmed. He had gradually taught himself to think that his own luxuries and his own comforts should in his own estimation be paramount to everything. He was not naturally selfish, but his life had almost necessarily engendered selfishness. Marrying had come to be looked upon as an evil—as had old age—not of course an unavoidable evil,

but one into which a man will probably fall sooner or later. To put off marriage as long as possible, and when it could no longer be put off to marry money, was a part of his creed. In the meantime the great delight of his life came from women's society. He neither gambled nor drank. He hunted and fished, and shot deer and grouse, and occasionally drove a coach to Windsor. But little love affairs, flirtation, and intrigues, which were never intended to be guilty, but which now and again brought him into some trouble, gave its charm to his life. On such occasions he would, too, at times, be very badly in love, assuring himself sometimes with absolute heroism that he would never again see this married woman, or declaring to himself in moments of self-sacrificial grandness that he would at once marry that unmarried girl. And then, when he had escaped from some especial trouble, he would take to his regiment for a month, swearing to himself that for the next year he would see no woman besides his aunts and his grandmother. When making this resolution he might have added his cousin Adelaide. They were close friends, but between them there had never been the slightest spark of a flirtation.

In spite of all his little troubles, Captain De Baron was a very popular man. There was a theory abroad about him that he always behaved like a gentleman, and that his troubles were misfortunes rather than faults. Ladies always liked him, and his society was agreeable to men because he was neither selfish nor loud. He talked only a little, but still enough not to be thought dull. He never bragged or bullied or bounced. He didn't want to shoot more deer or catch more salmon than another man. He never cut a fellow down in the hunting-field. He never borrowed money, but would sometimes lend it when a reason was given. He was probably as ignorant as an owl of anything really pertaining to literature, but he did not display his ignorance. He was regarded by all who knew him as one of the most fortunate of men. He regarded himself as being very far from blessed, knowing that there must come a speedy end to the things which he only half enjoyed, and feeling partly ashamed of himself in that he had found for himself no better part.

"Jack," said Mrs. Houghton, "I can't blow you up for being late, because Mr.

Houghton has not yet condescended to show himself. Let me introduce you to Lady George Germain." Then he smiled in his peculiar way, and Mary thought his face the most beautiful she had ever seen. "Lord George Germain, who allows me to call him my cousin, though he isn't as near as you are. My sister-in-law, you know." Jack shook hands with the old lady in his most cordial manner. "I think you have seen Mr. Mildmay before, and Miss Mildmay." Mary could not but look at the greeting between the two, and she saw that Miss Mildmay almost turned up her nose at him. She was quite sure that Mrs. Houghton had been wrong about the love. There had surely only been a pretence of love. But Mrs. Houghton had been right, and Mary had not yet learned to read correctly the signs which men and women hang out.

At last Mr. Houghton came down. "Upon my word," said his wife, "I wonder you are not ashamed to show yourself."

"Who says I'm not ashamed? I'm very much ashamed. But how can I help it if the trains won't keep their time? We were hunting all day to-day—nothing very good, Lord George, but on the trot from eleven to four. That tires a fellow, you know. And the worst of it is, I've got to do it again on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday."

"Is there a necessity?" asked Lord George.

"When a man begins that kind of thing he must go through with it. Hunting is like women. It's a jealous sport. Lady George, may I take you down to dinner? I am so sorry to have kept you waiting."

THE PRESS OF THE TRADES.

SUCH a trades' newspaper as *The Builder*, so prominent and honourable in its long existence, almost makes us forget that it is, after all, only an organ for one set of readers, treating the topics (many-branched certainly) in which they are interested, and charged necessarily with its own technicalities. Substituting the words *The Engineer* for *The Builder*, and almost the same paragraphs might be repeated. Getting, next, quite into the professions, there is *The Law Times*, with other legal journals abreast of it—just as building and engineering have not been exhausted when the two papers put as their representatives have had their naming; there is *The Lancet*, with other

platforms for medicine, surgery, and their interests; there are the gazettes of the Army, the Navy, the Church; of Banking, Shipping, Mining; of Patentees; of Accountants; of the worlds known as the Chemical, Pharmaceutical, Nautical, Electrical, Theatrical, Botanical, Horological, Agricultural, Musical, Photographic, Phonographic, Phonetic, Mechanic, Artistic. Add *The Gardeners' Magazine* to these; add *The Farmer*; add *The Commercial Travellers' Gazette*, *The Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*, the sporting papers, *The Timber Trades' Journal*, *The Brewers' Guardian*, *The Colliery Guardian*, *The Mark Lane Express*—and it probably will be thought that in them are marshalled all the mouth-pieces of all occupations, avocations, professions, callings, arts, and mysteries, with not another example left behind. Stay. Before this thought can have had time to take solid shape, it will be seen that it must have a supplement. Milliners, dress-makers, needle-workers, have a large literature of their own in certain ornamented magazines of fashion, owning French as well as English titles, in certain journals for Englishwomen, young and more mature. These speak for so important a section of workers and designers, of employers and employed, that when trades' newspapers are the theme, for justice as well as for gallantry, they must not be omitted. And even beyond these we come to journals circulating among the initiated, written by some of a fraternity for the behoof of the rest of their fraternity, the mere names of which are unknown to the outer world, and must, as a rule, remain so. Exclusiveness is a necessity of their existence, as vital as concentration of aim and purpose. Yet, gatherings of facts can be had from these journals of quite wholesome and pleasant interest—being sure of which, a few of them have been collected together, and may be here presented.

Imprimis, there is *The Hairdressers' Chronicle*. Acquaintance is made in this with a *Hairdressers' Academy* in the metropolis; with co-operative societies (including one for French "hands"), where there are schools of instruction, asking the moderate terms of half-a-crown for ten weeks' teaching, including the successful feature of dressings on living models for small prizes, and the presentation of a photograph to each master-subscriber of the most approved coiffure. Acquaintance is made with provincial societies and associations. In Glasgow,

for instance, the life of these is vigorous; they have budded into three stirring institutions, The United, The Masters', the Philanthropic—only that hairdressers in Glasgow are mostly called in the old French style, barbers. Edinburgh advertises its association too; so, to name a few more towns, do Halifax, Hanley, Bradford, Nottingham, Birmingham—all having a periodical day of meeting, a chairman, a secretary. In *The Chronicle*, hairdressers' businesses to be disposed of are described as eligible because they have "three schools," because they are opposite an hotel "which alone supports the business," because they do mostly a gentlemen's trade; disengaged assistants are described as eligible because they are gentlemen's hands well up in boardwork, because they are boardmen, can shave, and have a fair knowledge of ladies' work as well. Young ladies as assistants are looked upon as treacherous. A writer in *The Chronicle* says—no doubt a "valued correspondent:" "Should any hairdresser at this moment be dreaming that he has complete command of ever so many sparkling and accomplished girls, who are an attraction to his shop, let him wake from the reverie, for Hymen has but to raise his finger, and, presto, his rooms will be deserted at the shortest notice the law will permit." When the fancy-dress-ball season is beginning, hairdressers are counselled in their *Chronicle* to supply themselves with a certain Parisian art-production, giving engravings of the coiffures of La Duchesse du Maine, Louis Quatorze; of La Princesse de Lamballe, Louis Seize; of a Coiffure du Directoire, 1797; of a Diane de Poitiers, 1550; and so on. In the advertising columns we may learn where are the dépôts for wax busts (a fine assortment always in hand); for hairdressers' scissors; for human hair, taper-curved, taper-straight, English turned, nearly clubbed; for chloroform wash for bald patches; for *Le Friseur*, an illustrated hairdressers' journal published in Berlin; for *Le Moniteur de la Coiffure*, and *La Reine de la Coiffure*, two trade organs published in Paris, embellished with engravings, and made useful by instructions, in the French and English languages, how the new dressings are to be done. A well-written "leader" in *The Hairdressers' Chronicle*, too, urges hairdressers to organise lectures on elementary chemistry, on the historical coiffure, the growth and structure of human hair, the diseases of it, the best methods of their treatment; for hairdressers are the only

body of tradesmen, the writer says, who "seem afraid of entering into engagements which they know will benefit themselves, for fear at the same time they would prove advantageous to their brethren." Pending the adoption of this properly-advocated reform, *The Chronicle* gives hairdressers all the information it can. It tells them not to be in too great a hurry to believe that the highest ladies in Paris have discarded chignons, and wear only their own neatly-knotted hair; it tells them of the failures in the trade, the adjudications, the misdemeanours, the actions-at-law; it tells them of any innovations and inventions—for instance, that "the principle of the rotary brush in hairdressing is now extended to the management of studs," by means of a patent groomer, that grooms horses in five minutes; it tells them even (jocosely) of the Yankee barber who has a hollow ball attached to his scissors, the wind from which blows away the fragments of his customers' hair as fast as he can cut them off.

Saint Crispin is a trade journal, also, which calls for attention. "There's nothing like leather," is the motto it bears boldly under its title; and it manfully proceeds to take the bull by the horns in a second fashion, inasmuch as it carries a pair of ox-horns to divide these words, engraved and intermingled. Immediately underneath this it is quite in character to find leathers advertised—largely. They are known as Butts, it seems; they are known as Union bends; they are known as Oak soles, as English shoulders, as Foreign ranges, as Cordovans, as Kip sides (rolled and struck), as Bronze roans, as Basils, as Russet offals, as White splits, as Coloured skivers, as Crust kangaroos, Enamelled seals, Levant gnus, Horse hides, Memel calves, Strained sheep, French kids, Calendered lamb. Turning from this, it is seen that other singular articles are for sale. Some of these are channelling-machines, root trees, half-whites, Croydons, malleable hobs, cut tip-nails, B. Y. heels, toe-plates, rasps, grindery, wrought countersunks, and all kit tools. A tone of badinage is assumed by *Saint Crispin*. This is observed in the columns which are filled with communications under the titles, "Dodges of the Trades," and so on. One "dodge" especially revealed is that called Misfits, which the revealer happily styles Pictures of the Old Masters, and which he declares to be regular Northampton manufacture, as impossible to be

measured goods returned as it would be for a baker to hand out of his steaming oven new-made loaves of stale bread. Many firms keep more than ordinary bad-fitters, says the revealer satirically, if these be misfits; it is much more certain that numbers of persons are always buying shagreen spectacles, that in all these cases the customers are sold, whilst the boots they bargain for are not above half-soled. Then corns are spoken of, facetiously, as a legacy left by boots—as a range of infernal mountains to plague and torture, proving that the evil that men do lives after them. The women “who exhibit their folly by the high-heeled boots of to-day” Saint Crispin calls geese; and it prophesies that in twenty years’ time there will not be an upright old woman to be seen. But Saint Crispin can be historical and scientific within its own domain, when its mood becomes serious and solemn. For history, it tells how Agincourt was fought on Saint Crispin’s-day, and how Praise-God Barebones was a currier in Fleet-street. For science it gives a sterling paper on the best-proved tanning agents—the same being hemlocks and willows, the many varieties of which are mentioned, with their English as well as their Latin names. Continental transactions are searched, too, and quotations given from a speech at the Shoe Manufacturers’ Congress at Frankfort, in which the German speaker tried to rouse the energies of his German hearers by reproaching them that they have to purchase their best lastings in France, their best straps in England, their best elastics in Switzerland, the best shoe-pegs in North America, their best shoe-paste in Austria, and so on. In general matters Saint Crispin gives his opinion that “exhibitions do not effect much, because it does not pay to convey boots hundreds of miles with the mere chance of being patted on the back and praised as a good boy;” and Saint Crispin tells of a certain George, drunken and a cobbler, who, having no leather to mend a pair of boots, stripped off the calf cover of his mother’s bible, stitched it on, blacked it, and never spoke about the “bible boots” afterwards without much enjoyment and a self-congratulatory chuckle.

There shall be a little call made now upon The Bakers’ Record.

“I hold every man a debtor to his profession,” a baker is recorded in it to have quoted—“I hold every man a debtor to his profession, from the which, as men of

course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they, of duty, to endeavour themselves, by way of amends, to be a help and ornament thereunto.”

From Lord Bacon is this, the baker himself records; and he records also that he quotes it because he desires to call the attention of the baking trade to what Lord Bacon has said. It is not to be touched. As a thought it stands golden; as a standard, raised above the heads of fellow-workers for a goal for them to aim at, the selector stands—next to golden, and, ungrudgingly he is told so. But the selector speaks at a Bakers’ Association; and let an enquiry be made as to what the main business of this association, and others akin to it, really is. It seems at first all glamour, mystery. The words are in one report: “A complaint was brought from Such-a-road, and Messrs. This, That, and T’other had something to say respecting Some-farther-road, upon which the doctor received instructions to attend and administer.” The words are in another report: “Mr. Somebody’s smiling countenance betokens success, and he told how he and the other doctor had been enabled so far to effect a cure as to remove one of those very objectionable plasters never prescribed by genuine practitioners. They had also been up and down the land persuading and conciliating, and would pledge their professional reputation that the health of a certain district would be firmly established by next Monday.” The same report continues: “He learned that two gentlemen in Which-lane would also rise on that auspicious morning to a higher level;” that “having heard the sound of fourpence three-farthings in Brixmondton he had been forthwith to the brickyard, had found it a true sound, but that the bricks were deaf to its charms, and consequently that nobody else was going to listen.” The glamour gradually departs, as this is thought over; a glimmer of light takes its place. Besides, other reports read that Mr. Someone “had succeeded in obtaining a promise from those gentlemen who have been fivepence half-penny to advance to sixpence;” that Messrs. Who and What “had gained a promise from Messrs. Dough and Flour to raise a halfpenny this week and a halfpenny next;” that “the leading shops in the road will not be trifled with;” that “unpleasant tidings had arrived that Cottage-road was troubled again by Mr. Household, who had gone to fivepence;” that Mr. Fancy

"would not go up, and declared he had two minds to go down another halfpenny;" that two gentlemen had "waited upon Mrs. Roll to request that lady to go to sixpence halfpenny;" that "those gentlemen who had stood true to their colours merited praise, and it was to be hoped they would be amply repaid in being able 'to maintain' the highest price." And it is manifest from all of this that an organised system of watch and ward is kept up by (some) bakers, who compel the adoption of a certain tariff of prices, or else (like the Cornishmen) they will know the reason why; and although these gentlemen vow at these same associations that when "a figure is too low to give satisfaction" they only wish to raise it to a living price to obtain a legitimate profit upon their several undertakings," the sound of this is a little discordant with that entreaty to every man to be a help and ornament unto his profession, and it causes wonder. However, bakers, there is no doubt, have a right to be reckoned as knowing the reasons of their own ruling. And when they are found coming forward briskly to seek situations on the grounds that they are Scotch forehands, light second hands, bread foremen, quick setters, van men; can pipe, can drive, can mould, can set (full price preferred, though, as an insidious recommendation); that they are well up in all kinds of yeast, in Vienna bread, in pastry, in small goods, ices, creams, and jellies; and are well used, in addition, to serving customers, or barrow; the acknowledgment must come that these are genuine accomplishments, and that the owners of them must not be too tightly reined. Gratitude comes to The Bakers' Record, too, for giving such felicitous information. The Organ gives comfort and content by it. So it does, when it says that first-rate single hands, second hands, third hands, can be supplied immediately by certain houses on application at the bar. So it does more than all when, in detailing the visit of some London delegate to some provincial meeting, it arranges the subject in long paragraphs, headed, like a royal progress, The Start, The Journey, The Welcome, The Object, The Meeting, The Mission, &c., quite seriously; and even makes known how the delegate did not drive to the station, but walked there, in a glow; how he was much moved to tenderness by a young lady in the train; how he had such and such reflections; how his bodily con-

dition was at last somewhat jaded, because he had been precisely six hours and a quarter without partaking of either food or drink. With baking interests touched off thus roseately and "interviewingly," every modern journalistic improvement has been adopted, and nothing further remains to be desired.

The Grocer is a trades' newspaper, business-like, compact, and, if age be good datum on which to form judgment, satisfactorily established and flourishing. Coming into the market with it, The Grocers' Journal is a younger brother, cheap, to suit the requirements of a cheap-press century; as both speak to grocers, though, and, as it is this technical speech which is being now considered, the two bear the significance of one, with the family tie remaining undivided. The family tie of grocer, too, is a tie wide-spreading, it must be recollected. Oilmen may lay claim to it, provision-dealers, tobaccoists, drysalters; and as these claims—and a large variety of others—lie through the ground occupied by the brush trade, the glue trade, the preserve-jar trade, the sausage-casing trade, and many more, it is rather hard to say where kinship is lost sight of and ended. Somebody's Patent Cat Food, for example, is an odd item to appear among advertisements to grocers. It is curious, also, to read, "Wanted, a hundred Cads in good condition." When singed sides follow this, and pickled mids, it is not at all extraordinary that graves should be brought into grocers' consideration. India mess, another article of purchase and sale, sounds political: Plantation tridge and Barbadoes dabs seem to touch the Slavery Circular; Faro taps savour of the Kursaal; Common titlers, Mother cloves, Naturals, recall witchery and superstition; shute-stored, rough-riddlings, handed-squares, jaggery, are jaggery, if the a in that word is a misprint for u, and something necromantic and cabalistic is intended. Yet, all these are varieties of sugars, salts, bacons, porks, and what not, forming ordinary grocers' merchandise, or they would not be so regularly and neatly listed. It requires some knowledge to master them. Then butters are further catalogued as Stubble Kiel, Friesland, Normandy (in crocks), Jersey (in baskets), Home Counties, Pure Paris, Ostend; cheeses, besides those better known, are Gouda, Red Edain, Wiltshire Loaf; bacons are Hambro' Sizeables, Waterford Intermediates, Canadian

Smalls, Cumberland Cuts, Short-rib Middles. It is thought well, too, that grocers should know how much Irish butter, for instance, is shipped for England and Scotland from the ports of Cork and Waterford every month; and accordingly there is a memorandum that one firm of purveyors despatched eleven thousand nine hundred and fifty-five firkins in September—nearly four hundred a day—whilst there is no overlooking of the fact that a small dealer, in the same time, despatched only his modest two. Altogether some eighty thousand firkins of butter were shipped for England by Irishmen owning such familiar names as O'Sullivan, Flynn, Murphy, Malony, Dogherty, Scanlan, Phelan, Kearney, in this selected month of September; and if that little commercial item be well borne in mind, it may have interest for Home Rulers and other politicians, as well as for oilmen, provision-dealers, drysalters, grocers, and the rest. What, however, is purely to the point held by these last dealers is the fact that railway companies, in the midlands, have arranged to cellar their goods for them on delivery, but not to thrall them, or place them on settlers. Grocers, it is clear—or is it obscure?—must congratulate each other heartily. The arrangement was made, it is announced, in consequence of a “ring” formed by traffic managers, owing to “thoughtless tradesmen requesting carriers’ employes to carry chests of tea, or bags of sugar, up ladder-looking steps or along galleries.” Nothing but a meeting of grocers and carriers could settle this abuse; so a meeting was convened, and a law laid down. Another law relating to grocers, of long practice and acceptance, is that a quarter-pound sampling is allowed out of a caddy-box of tea—the abbreviated “cad” of recent mentioning—that a half-pound sampling is allowed out of a half-chest, a whole pound out of a whole chest. These withdrawn quantities are to be substituted by the same weight of tea of equal value; and, inasmuch as some dealers now are evading this honest condition, and filling up with goods of an inferior price, it is suggested that the portions be packed securely in sealed bags, for ready identification. Other little matters relating to tea are that importers advertise to sell at “a great drop;” that all tea-drinkers are advised to make their tea with water the instant it rises to the boil the first time after it has been drawn cold; water that

has been kept half-heated—in a boiler, say—and that has been off the boil and on it, and off the boil and on it again, being found to be minus that life and freshness that allow of the fine aroma of the tea to be retained.

Grocers’ assistants, a leader in one of their journals says, must possess a great deal of tact. When old ladies enter a grocer’s shop, they “can talk for hours about things which are of no possible interest to mortal man—let imagination complete the painful picture; but the grocer must listen to the old ladies—of both sexes—or perish.” Grocers’ assistants, also, are to possess great skill in “dressing” a window. They are to hussel their fruit well in a long wet bag, and then they are not to put it in their windows in a mass with soap, candles, butter, cheese, and bacon. If they are expert at the counter, they may call at Mr. So-and-so’s. If they understand soap-boiling, plain and mottled, and have no objection to go to New Zealand, they may call at Mr. Somebody Else’s, and get an engagement of a good three pounds a week for their profitable specialty. Travellers, not minding samples of a weight under two pounds, may have such for canvassing; and assistants themselves seem to be proud to be able to say that they can solicit, can serve well at either counter, can chop sugar, are confidential firsts, good wrappers, out of house, with West-end references. All these may remember pleasantly that some dried-fruit merchants live where they should live, in Padding-lane; that if any event happens of importance to these merchants or to themselves—such as their opening a branch establishment, their retirement from business, their enlargement of their premises—the fact will have a neat paragraph in a column that is a sort of Court Circular among the Commons, called *The Week*; that confectioners’ jewellery—for enclosing in their bon-bon packets and so on—is sold at the miraculous price of eightpence for a gross, in quantities of not less than five gross, however, which means seven hundred and twenty articles for three shillings and fourpence, or exactly eighteen articles for a penny; that, as a last item that shall be cited, there is a pamphlet selling, of momentous interest, entitled “How to checkmate Co-ops.”

There remain yet many other trades’ newspapers. These are known as *The Tailor*, *The Ironmonger*, *The Printers’ Register*, *The Stationer*, *The Tanner*—the

price of which is not the same as its title, for it is twopence more—The Tobacco Trade Price, The Draper, The Furniture Gazette, The Hotel Journal, The Saddler, The Paper Makers' Circular, The Labour News, The Sewing-Machine Gazette, The Boot and Shoe Trades' Chronicle, The English Labourer, The Journal of Gas Lighting, The Dairyman, the youngest born of all. A few others possibly have been overlooked. But it would be wearisome to do more than give the names of these—not because they would not yield as much interest as the others, but because ordinary limits have been reached; and now the names are down, the subject shall be left. There must be a short addendum though in respect of one of these organs, The Tailor. If women, smarting with the rod of amiable sarcasm about their consideration for dress, should chance to light upon a stray copy of it, it will not seem to them that men, in their consideration for dress, are so vastly far behind them. Tailors, it will be discovered, are kept sedulously well informed as to all movement in masculine fashion. A new coat has been seen, they are warned, "reaching quite half-way down the calf, single-breasted, having a long vent behind, the buttons coming through to the outside." There will be a demand for a certain coat that "does not define the body very closely; made from ribbed diagonals, gray, brown, and drab; the edges either flat-braided or bound wide with heavy military braid." "In some suits made by a firm in Aristocracy-street for Mr. Blue Blood"—the latest Count d'Orsay, it may be presumed, put down by name, unconscious gentleman!—"and intended to be worn during a yachting-cruise, the coats were of the reefer style, but lengthy, and buttoning straight down, entirely hiding the vest." Also, "many young gents who wished to see themselves in the extreme of fashion," and "a number of young gents, who never feel that they are dressed unless wearing something decidedly new," will "take to" a garment three or four inches longer than one represented; "but gentlemen who prefer dressing with decorum and good taste," and who like "a small roll and collar buttoned pretty close up, the space between being very comfortably and pleasantly filled up by a fancy woollen scarf," the cloth for this, moreover, having "a curl on its face;"—such gentlemen, it is asserted, will wear the coat that "will hold the first place this season." "Dual

garmenture" also comes in for much close discussion, science, speculation, and advice. The article is "draughted" by a plumb-line; "the frontal line forms the central front of trousers, and is named the central front of gravitation;" the weight must be suspended "from the waistband, so that it must terminate on the instep," a fact assured by experiments, whenever experiments "could be presumed to be made," &c. &c. &c. And is not this somewhat conclusive and a little provocative of gentle feminine retaliation?

KING'S COMBE.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

AFTER having escaped, for more than half a century, the universal scribbling mania, I fall a victim to it at the age of sixty-five—old enough to know better, most people would say.

I hear all around me, from men and women, young and old, people with brains and people without, much talk of the degeneracy of the age; what fine fellows we were in our grandfathers' time; how even our earlier ancestors would have looked with scorn upon such a dwindled, feeble, over-civilised set as we have become. At such a time the experience of a man whose leading idea this was, may be of general interest: it is this thought that impels me to make my first attempt at authorship.

My friend was not one of those men who let an idea cling to their heels all their lives, or smoulder in their brains at great risk to themselves and annoyance to their friends; he was a man of action; a man of brains and muscle; a powerful-armed, clear-headed, strong-willed Englishman.

He was born at King's Combe, the old home of his family; his mother died when he was seven years old, after entreating his father to watch over and train their boy carefully. This the squire in all sincerity swore to do.

So, within a month he put the urchin, who was already the terror of the servants, on a skittish pony, and told him to stick on. The boy clung sturdily to his steed for two fields, when the artful little beast, by an unexpected swerve, succeeded in throwing him; upon this, the squire picked up his son and heir, and gave him a whipping, took him home and sent him to bed. The next day the boy demanded to be set on the pony again, and asked for a whip; the animal ran away with him, after trying

everything in his power to dislodge the little creature who stuck like a limpet to his back. Not a bit daunted, young Combe, finding that he could not stop him, beat him with might and main; and even when, tired out, the pony would fain have trotted on quietly, his plucky little rider, with clenched teeth and puckered brow, whipped him and kicked him until the animal knew he was mastered; indeed the child administered the punishment with such good will, that the squire himself took him off—to spare the pony.

After this, when Squire Combe found that his son took his fences without the encouragement of a horse-whipping, he relaxed his vigilance; and as the boy's obstinate temper and indomitable pluck developed, and he mastered every horse, hound, and hedge in the county, his father was thoroughly satisfied with his fulfilment of his promise.

But one day, when young Combe was twelve years old, it suddenly turned out that he could not read. Shocked at this flaw in his system, the squire instantly sent him off to the old rector for a lesson in spelling; and engaged the reverend man to furnish his son with as much general knowledge as could be crammed into him in two hours a day, whenever there was no meet of fox-hounds, or other necessary interruption to his studies. So his education continued until he was nearly twenty, when he all at once demanded to be sent to college. His father, never very open-handed, demurred at the expense, and told him that he was better educated than any Combe had been before him. But Percy had made up his mind. So a tutor was engaged to prepare the young man as quickly as he might, spurred on by the bullying of father and son.

Young Combe was no fool, and, his will once exerted, he conquered Greek and Latin as he had done hedges and ditches. But once at Oxford, he went back to his old love, and it was there I met him, at the head of the wildest, boldest set in the university. I was a good shot in those days, but Combe beat me hollow; he was a very fair oarsman, and at riding, driving, leaping, and walking, not a man could come near him.

"Scoffing Combe" and "Cruel Combe" he was called, for he had neither reverence nor mercy.

He was twice rusticated for acts of wild audacity; ran into debt pretty deeply, and while waiting for the result of a bold

avowal of his difficulties, which he had written to his father, he received the news that the squire was dead. So, at the age of twenty-four, Percy Combe found himself the possessor of nearly half Lubshire, and of more ready money than he or any one else had given the old squire credit for possessing.

With a fixed idea of the degeneracy and effeminacy of the human race, the young squire did not occupy himself in devising plans for the reformation of the whole, but began setting to rights that portion of it which was under his immediate care.

He had ridden and hunted over the county until he knew every corner of it, and the state of every field; to the horror of the old Tory tenants, this professed ultra-Conservative began a severe weeding of the farmers—a regular Radical uprooting of some of the "oldest inhabitants."

"Do they think I'll spare them because they have spoiled the land longer than their neighbours? No, turn the dogs out, to make room for better men."

So they went; and better men—or better farmers—took their places. To men who "knew clay from sand," as the new squire said, the land was let on easy terms; only—they must spare the foxes.

There was a pack of hounds kept at King's Combe once more; the late squire had given it up on account of the expense; and my friend began to look out for a wife.

Combe was the richest and the handsomest man in the county, and the stories of his cruelty did not deter the Lubshire maidens from smiling their sweetest smiles, and showing off their prettiest airs and graces, in the hope of captivating him. But Combe stood fire like a veteran; he was no more afraid of an army of coquettes than of a swarm of gnats; he ran the gauntlet of all the brightest eyes within fifty miles, until he found what he wanted—a handsome, high-bred, high-spirited woman, with fortune and a pedigree; a will of her own, too, they said; but the squire had expected that.

"I've broken in a few thoroughbreds," said he.

And there is no reason to think that his boast was premature. They had six children, and then Margaret Combe died. People said he killed her, but Combe was not a favourite with the rustics.

The eldest child, a girl now ten years old, he sent away to school, saying, "Margaret was hard enough to stand a little

polishing." His five boys he kept with him, that he might train them himself "to be men, and none of your modern milk-sops!"

I paid my first visit to King's Combe when the eldest, Rutherford, was fifteen; and a bolder, harder set of wild young rascals I never met. The squire had to offer an immense salary to induce any tutor of ability, such as he wanted, to trust himself in the midst of such a crew; and the learned man who had been bold enough to accept the post would have been all but devoured, but for the protection vouchsafed him by the eldest son.

Rutherford was like his father, big, fair, and strong, with a steady, sullen courage that bore down all before him. He would take his brothers, and pitch them quietly out of window if they annoyed him; so the younger Combes felt for him a deep respect.

Concerning these little rascals, my chief care was to keep out of their way. They were neither brainless nor effeminate certainly; but, though not over-particular, I felt doubts as to the result of the squire's training.

"A little rough just now," said he to me; "but wait and see, they will be fine men."

When I next went to King's Combe it was late in the hunting-season, five years afterwards.

The three elder boys were at Harrow; and Dick and Bertie, having no one else to distract their attention, fought with each other, and left the rest of the household in comparative peace. These rough boys disgusted me, and we regarded each other with silent animosity.

One night, however, at about two o'clock, I was suddenly awakened by a noise in my dressing-room, which had no outlet except through my room; the window looked over the stable-yard, and one of the out-buildings was close under it. I listened: without doubt there was someone getting in by the window. I rose quietly, and taking my revolver, which always lay by my bedside, peeped through the chink of the door. Yes, there was the thief, just bringing his last leg over the window-sill. I threw open the door, and, pointing my revolver, shouted "Who's there?"

"Stop, you old fool!" was the courteous reply.

It could be no other than one of my host's sons. So I put down my weapon,

and, striking a match, discovered Dick Combe, in impromptu attire, with a contemptuous grin on his face.

"What are you doing in my room, sir, at this time of night? Isn't one safe from your tricks even in bed?"

"Why didn't you stop there then? You might have known it was only one of our larks. But, I say, major, how about your sleeping with one eye open now? I'll swear they were both shut when I passed through your room!" said the boy, his eyes gleaming with mischief.

"Passed through my room, you young rascal!"

"Why, yes; to get out. You don't suppose I've been passing the night in the stable-yard?"

"Then, what the——"

"Oh fie, major! There, don't kick up a row. My room's over yours, you know; I heard your horse kicking and whining, so I thought I'd go and see if the brute was comfortable; and I came down the shortest way, you see. One eye open! Oh Lord! Which one was it, major?" and, with a diabolical laugh, Dick wrenched himself from my grasp, blew out my candle, and fled.

My visitor departed, I could only stifle a rising anathema, and stumble pensively back to bed. This was a kind act; the first I had ever heard of among the cruel Combes; for it was to relieve, not his own horse, but mine, that Dick had turned out of bed. Thinking of them, for the first time, not as young savages to be carefully avoided, it did strike me that the squire's system was rather an awful kind of training, which, in its process of strengthening, repressed all gentler feelings so carefully. What would be the result of turning five strong, hard, utterly selfish young giants loose upon the world? For the first time I gave a little of my pity to the giants.

The next day I listened with more interest than usual to the squire's talk about his sons.

"They will be ready for harness soon, now; Rutherford too, major; I'll have none of them loafing. I'll give them each one start—it is enough for a thoroughbred—set them all off in their race with time, the world, or whatever you call it; and then—devil take the hindermost!"

"But won't you give them a canter first, Combe? They are so young."

"Young! ay, and sound; and it is such should do the work of the world. No good comes of letting young fellows idle

away half-a-dozen years or so looking about 'em; running into debt; coming down to the old home once in a way for a few spare hundreds or a day with the hounds; picking up a little French philosophy and a little English blackguardism, and calling it knowledge of the world! No, that only comes by fighting it; and my boys, major, my boys have pluck and sinew; they will make a good fight, and—they'll win!"

There was the force of a brave heart and an iron will in the squire's words.

Time went on, and each, at the age of twenty-one, got his start. Rutherford chose to be a merchant, and thrived; the others, although the squire allowed them their choice, followed the suggestions he gave them. He got a place in the Tintacks Office for Percy, the third. People told him he was throwing his clever son away; but the squire only said:

"Percy will get on wherever he may be."

It was respectfully hinted that a place of this kind would have been better for James, the second son, than the City, for which he was destined (James was a passive, surly giant, of the fairy-tale type); whereat the squire grew stolid.

"There's no taint of genius, your modern genius, in the Combe blood. You don't suppose I want Jim to develop a talent for prospectus-making, and to outcheat the shoddyocracy itself! But the boy, lout as he looks, will make his way. Never mind the brains; he's got the stuff of a man in him, see if that won't pull him through."

And it did; Jim got on, to the surprise of students of physiognomy, and at five-and-twenty was accounted a rising man.

"As for Dick, he hasn't brains enough for anything but the army, major," said the squire to me. And into the army Dick went. Cathbert was not yet provided for. It was nearly two years after Dick's start when I met the squire in town one glorious autumn morning.

"What! you here, squire? And at this time of the year?"

"Yes, come up to have a crow over the chimney-pots, and to see how yellow you are all looking. Hang me if I've seen a decent-looking face except my own since I've been in London! and your villainous soot and smoke so begrime the looking-glass, that it was all I could do to recognise that. As for you, you're as bent as a witch and as withered as a piece of

parchment; but then, poor fellow, what can you expect in this hole? Come down to us for the hunting; I'm going to give all my boys a gallop, and we shall have a capital season. Come and see them. I told you they would open the oyster, major—beg your pardon, colonel—and, by Jove, so they have. Come you must!"

I was very glad to accept the invitation, and, at the beginning of the season, two days before a breakfast and meet at King's Combe, I got down there late in the afternoon, just five years ago.

At the door of the station stood a dog-cart, with a powerful bay mare rearing and plunging, a groom trying to hold her head, and a handsome boy of nineteen or so, unknown to me by face, but swearing in the well-known Combe style, holding the reins.

"Ah, colonel, how d'y'e do? Haven't got a hand to spare with this brute, but I'll have her steady in a minute."

But an old cavalry officer knows how to cut a knot of this kind; I put my hand on the rail of the cart, and was up in a minute by the side of this off-hand charioteer. He gave me an approving nod.

"All right, William!"

And off we went at a good pace. When the mare had at last steadied a bit at the foot of a steep hill, my companion favoured me with a few comments on the scenery, which is as pretty round King's Combe as anywhere in England.

"That's the five-bar where Tom Seymour broke his leg last summer. There's the hah! that always weeds the field, colonel. Best covert in Lubshire that to the right. Good hunting country—plenty of stiffish fences, and an awkward brook or two. That over yonder, two fields beyond the turnips, is the jump of the country," said he, pointing to a leap which even at this distance looked impracticable. A wide brook at the end of a clayey field, then a bank surrounded by a tall, close hedge; and, as my guide informed me, a deep drop on to loose soil on the other side.

"There are only two men I know who can take that without making their wills," said young Combe, coolly; "the squire, and Rutherford the rider (that's Rutherford, nicknamed so by us when we were little chaps), can do it on Lady Betty, and even the squire doesn't take it now except when he is in very good form. As for the

rest of us, we know better than to try! But I forgot, colonel; you know all about the country; you were here before I was put into knickerbockers."

I assured him that what he said was new to me, and he rattled on discursively until we reached the lodge, where the gate was opened like magic by a frightened little girl, and we dashed through the long avenue up to the door.

The squire and Miss Margaret had not yet returned, the butler said, so I was taken up to my room, the same that I had had before.

I did not know whether the redoubtable Dick still occupied the room overhead, but there was someone there in boots and a passion; a couple of dogs were barking and yelping in the yard below, to the accompaniment of a deep voice, as of an idle man amusing himself at their expense; and my friend of the dog-cart was cracking hunting-whips in the hall, and whistling like Boreas. The taint of effeminacy, so dreaded by the squire, was evidently as far from King's Combe as ever.

The cracking ceased, and the thundering overhead was succeeded by a heavy tread down the stairs, before I left my room and made for the drawing-room.

The prospect of an hour or so in the society of five young men of different degrees of sulkiness, and a strong mutual combativeness, did not please me; from old association I felt very much as if about to enter a den of lions. As I went downstairs I saw standing in front of the huge fire in the hall a gentleman, young and well-dressed; the sight was very welcome, for he was not tall enough for a Combe, though erect and well-built; and his hair was dark, while they were fair. As I reached the last stair he turned and—he was Combe to the core! He came forward with the air of a well-behaved prince, and said, bowing: "Sir George, I am afraid you do not recognise one of your old tormentors; I am Percy Combe."

I had scarcely time to wonder how the rough, pert boy had been transformed into the courteous, well-bred man, for he led me at once to the drawing-room, and I stood once more in the presence of all the "cruel Combes." The change had not been so great in all of these. The handsome, sullen-looking giant who bore down upon me first was unmistakably

"the rider," with an imposing look of passive strength in face and form. I never liked Rutherford; his face wanted animation to carry off the cruel expression.

But could the indolent exquisite, well-built enough to practise the fashionable lounge without looking as if he were falling to pieces, with hair parted in the middle, and a dainty camellia in his button-hole, be "sulky Jim?" How could the squire put up with it? But a dandy of six feet two, broad in proportion, commands respect; Squire Combe probably knew that the diamond ring would in no wise cripple his son's hand if his own rights were infringed.

"Awfully cold you must have found it, driving," said he. And then my old friend "Dare-devil Dick" came forward. He was the one in whom I took the most interest, and I shook hands with him heartily. He was a good-looking young fellow of two or three and twenty, tall, slight and fair, with gray eyes; there was an honesty in his face still that attracted me; but instead of the bright, straight-forward look of old days, he wore a shamefaced expression which I did not like to see. He seemed to be in the famous "Combe sulks." He edged out of the group, and my charioteer was formally introduced to me as Cuthbert, whom I had not much noticed during my last visit, but whom I remembered, at the age of six, getting under the table to operate upon my boots with a pair of champagne-tweezers.

"I can't think what is keeping my father, Sir George," said Rutherford; "he will be much annoyed that he was not here to receive you."

And then began a discussion of hunting prospects, in which all took part except Dick, who threw in an occasional interjection from a corner of the room, where he was reading, with the air of one to whom this was an unaccustomed and tedious occupation.

My favourite Dick was the only one in whom the old surliness remained unchanged. Was the squire's plan the right one, after all, for turning out model English gentlemen? and how was it that Dick was the only exception? A follower of my profession too; I wanted to draw him into conversation.

"Well, Dick, and how do you like the army?"

He looked up, as black as thunder.

"Jolly, by Jove!" was his laconic answer.

Rutherford dropped his newspaper, and Percy asked me if I had seen that article in the "Saturday," on "Serene Simpletons," evidently to turn the conversation. Then he led me into the next room to see a new picture of a favourite horse.

"The squire had it taken last spring," said he; "the old horse has carried him well, and will carry him yet; by-the-bye, you won't find him in quite such good spirits as usual, I am afraid, Sir George. The fact is, he has had a disappointment. Dick has made a mess of it; got into debt, and will have to sell out. The squire is not used to having his plans upset, you know; and his favourite plan is that his boys shall succeed in life. It was a mistake to put Dick into the army; a soldier wants backbone as much as anybody, as you know, colonel."

Poor Dick! No wonder he was surly. It was not a pleasant thing to be the first failure of a man like the squire. I was silent for a minute, and then we heard the crunching of wheels on the gravel; the squire had returned.

Percy had been romancing a little, in order to bring in the subject of Dick's delinquencies neatly; Squire Combe was just the same as ever, but at dinner he did not speak to Dick. Margaret Combe was a handsome, well-bred, fair woman, not far short of thirty; more strikingly like her father than any of them. Her long white hand could control a horse almost as well as any of her brothers; but there was not a trace of the "fast young lady" about Margaret. Yet I did not wonder that she had never married when I saw the cold way in which she followed the squire's lead by ignoring unlucky Dick. I had felt great surprise, and even a kind of disappointment, at my five typical vagabonds having turned out so like other people. I had judged too soon. As the dinner went on, and the first slight restraint of my presence wore away, the old influence of their home began to work; and by the time Margaret left the room the Combe stamp was visible enough. Dick, who had been eating his dinner crestfallen and almost in silence, gave signs of returning animation by muttered comments on his eldest brother's remarks; and at last, when Rutherford made a statement about the condition of the fields, he flatly contradicted him. His father

turned his head sharply, and spoke to the scapegrace for the first time.

"Dick, hold your tongue."

The squire was absolute still. Dick was quiet, but I heard him swear under his moustache.

Presently the squire asked me to come and have a cigar in his study; and there, with each an arm-chair by the big, comfortable fire, we began to talk about "the boys;" the squire, in his brave old Roman way, adverting at once to Dick, the failure.

"It was too much to suppose that the old proverb would not hold good about the one black sheep in every flock," said he. "I believe I might have known it was Dick who was the fool. Percy has got it into his head that the army did for him, but one road to the devil is as short as another for a lad who wishes to go that way. Dick had his warning like the others."

The squire disposed of his son's destiny in his usual firm, clear tones. I was shocked, and heartily sorry for the poor lad—the old story of the world's sympathy with a ne'er-do-weel.

"But, squire, he is so young. He'll do yet. He has got the Combe pluck as much as any of them; there is not a bolder rider, a more fearless fellow in England than 'Dare-devil Dick.'"

The squire looked at me with his blue eyes keen and animated.

"Bold! Aye, he'd not be a Combe if he couldn't ride. But, colonel, do you think I wanted my boys to do nothing better than smash through a hedge or manage a thoroughbred? Dick would have made an excellent whip; but unfortunately he's a Combe and a gentleman. For me to own him my son, a lad must be neither fool nor craven. A man with ordinary brains—and Dick has brains—is a fool to race and bet, and risk three times the money he has to lose. Dick's a fool; so he may go his own way, and be hanged to him!"

This was more than I could stand.

"Squire, you're wrong. Dick is no old man before his time; but he has an honest look in his face which would become some of his brothers. I believe he is worth all the rest of them put together."

But the squire only answered good-humouredly:

"Ah, George, you always had a weakness for open country." Then he changed the subject. "But there is one thing troubles

me about my boys—they don't marry. It is not as if they would have any trouble about it; there's the very girl to hand—Lord Dereham's daughter. You know him—Dereham Hall? Heiress, good hunting country; fine, handsome girl, rides to hounds, takes her fences with the best of them. Well, they won't have a word to say to her. Not that I mind for Rutherford; he is shrewd, and will do well in marriage, as in everything else. But there's Dick. It would have been the saving of Dick; but he flung away that chance like the rest. Then there's Jim. A clever woman like that would have towed him through the world without any trouble, supplying brains and everything; just what would have suited him. But no, though he would give her a lead, mangle a joke for her amusement, swear at her groom for her—if she needed that; now he must needs neglect her for a little insignificant chit without nerve or money—our new parson's daughter—reads Tennyson and screams at sight of a spider. I forbade him to think of her at first, but now I suppose I must put up with it to settle him. As for Percy, I think he looks still higher than Lady Ethel. The beggar's clever—how he came by it the Lord knows! When they were all running wild here together it was Percy who had to make peace with irate farmers, or persuade a bumpkin whom they had knocked down that he felt rather the better for it than otherwise. Whipper-snapper as he was among four bullying boys, with fists like sledge-hammers, he never came to grief. He's not a thorough Combe—Percy has wires instead of sinews. I put him in the Tintacks because I thought he would have nothing to do there. When I was young, people said and believed that 'Satan found some mischief still for idle hands to do;' but now the rogues are the busy bees. And the City might have sharpened his faculties, as it has done those of many another indifferent honest fellow. But Percy won't rust in the Tintacks. I shouldn't be surprised if he were leader-writer to some Radical paper."

The shrewd old squire was not far wrong. I went upstairs, admiring the clear-headedness and penetration of my vigorous friend. But, as it turned out, there were some things which escaped even the lynx-eyes of Squire Combe.

A NIGHT WITH JAPANESE FIREMEN.

SOME four years ago we, the foreign community of Yokohama, Japan, were being continually burnt out during the winter months; and as for the native community, very few of them could boast of having kept a house intact for much more than six months. It was generally the same story—recklessness and carelessness on the part of the natives, the almost universal use of inflammable kerosene oil, the trumpery style of domestic architecture in vogue, and the utterly inadequate means possessed both by European and native settlements to prevent the spread of a fire.

It is true we had, in the European settlement, two splendid London-made steam fire-engines and an American machine, highly polished, painted, and decked with bells and lanterns, whilst throughout the Japanese town were scattered stations with squirts, ladders, and poles; but as there were no organised brigades to work the splendid engines, they rotted away in their sheds whilst property was being destroyed and lives risked, and the native squirts were rather worse than useless in the tremendous conflagrations to which we were becoming accustomed.

We used to talk the question of fire defence over at our dinner-tables, but nothing came of these conversations beyond a unanimous condemnation of everything and everybody connected with the municipal government of the settlement; so we remained contented to see houses destroyed on all sides of us, and rarely expressed surprise when the boom of the fire-bells hurried us away from dinner, to "assist" at the bonfire of some neighbour's goods and chattels.

We were talking the matter over more seriously than usual one evening—inasmuch as during the night before the "hong" next door had been completely gutted by fire, and our own pretty fairly damaged by falling bricks and streams of water—when a servant entered and whispered to me that there was a "number one Japanese typan" waiting to see one of us in the hall.

I went out, and was presented to a fine old fellow, clad in the superior bourgeois style, who announced himself as the captain of one of the Yedo fire-brigades. Coming so apropos as the visit did, we asked the old man in, and after humiliating himself for several minutes, à la mode Japonaise,

by sidling slowly towards us, and taking in audibly deep draughts of our tobacco-laden atmosphere, he consented to sit down, take a glass of sherry, and tell us his errand. He had heard, he said, that we were very uncomfortable about the frequent occurrence of fires in the settlement, and the utterly helpless condition we were in for lack of organisation; and he had come to suggest the formation of a native brigade of firemen, to be modelled on the system of Yedo—the city of fires par excellence—to co-operate with our own volunteers. In furtherance of this scheme, he wished that one or all of us should pay him a visit at his station in Yedo, to observe the working of his brigade, and to utilise such hints as we should pick up. This the old fellow brought out after a profuse expenditure of polite phrases and apologies, adding that, although he feared we might sneer at the primitive Yedo method of conducting these things, he imagined that, perhaps, we might pick up a useful hint or two.

Three of us accordingly went by train the next evening to Yedo, and were met at the terminus by our old friend with a dozen stalwart coolies, who shouldered our luggage, and preceded us to the fire-station, where we found the guard for the night drawn up in military order to receive us, clad in full costume, armed with hooks and axes, and looking smart and business-like.

Hospitality is one of the most pleasant characteristics of the Japanese nation, and ere we were allowed to inspect or view anything connected with the brigade, we were invited to a sumptuous banquet in the private house of the captain. Although we were warned that at any moment the alarm might sound, we made ourselves very comfortable for three hours on the soft white mats of the captain's state apartment, partaking of constant relays of fish, flesh, fruit, vegetables, sweets, and wine, and waited on by deft damsels clad in the brightest holiday attire. Then we lighted our cigars, and the captain, who by this time had got into full uniform—helmet curiously wrought, thick doubly quilted jacket and leggings, belt and fire-hook—proposed to show us over the station.

Probably, it had been put into good order on account of our visit, for I have oftentimes called at Japanese fire-stations, have found the guard asleep or gambling, the engine in a corner, apparently anything but fit for action, and the various hooks, ladders, and appliances heaped all over the

place in the direst confusion. At this special station, however, everything was in spick-and-span order. The engine itself—a bronze ornamented box, something like a tea-chest, with a squirt arrangement protruding from the middle, slung on to a stout pole—stood in readiness; the guard of the evening—looking very like the monks in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, their hoods covering their faces, with the exception of the eyes—were drawn up in line at the gate; outside, two huge lanterns inscribed with the divisional letter swung in the wind, and reflected the bronze ornamentation on the triangular pile of pails, and the carefully-burnished metal work of the hooks and ladders; while, up and down in front of the station, his eyes and ears all attention, paced a fireman, whose sole duty it was, at the first distant boom of a bell, or at the first faint redness of the sky, to run up a ladder placed perpendicularly in the ground to a height of some fifty feet, and to hammer away at the bell thereto attached. Every detail of organisation was most courteously explained to us by the captain, who seemed to take immense pride in the appearance of his station, and who rated in pretty severe terms one of the watch who wore his fire-hook suspended on the wrong side, and threatened expulsion to a second, who was indulging covertly in a whiff of tobacco. We stood chatting outside the station for some time, when snow began to fall, and a keen driving wind set in, which rendered motionless smoking anything but agreeable. The captain, observing this, rubbed his hands with something very akin to glee on his face, and remarked that as we were pretty sure to see something in the course of the night, we might as well turn in, drink a cup of hot saki, and make ourselves as comfortable as possible. So we went in, drank our steaming wine—very like hot negus, and not at all a bad nightcap—coiled ourselves up in our quilts, and, as we heard the wind dashing against the shutters, devoutly wished that, for a few hours at any rate, we might not be disturbed.

Apparently we had slept a very rapid forty winks, when we were awakened by a tremendous hullabaloo. To our confused senses, wandering as they were between the land of dreams and the land of stern actualities, everything seemed to have gone mad. We could see lanterns like fireflies flitting past the half-opened shutters, whilst demoniacal howls and shrieks seemed to be mixed up in one wild

chorus. So we jumped up, rubbed our eyes, and ran into the engine-house, where we found the captain, in full costume—helmet and plumes, jacket emblazoned with the brigade monogram, and thickly-padded leggings—already on pony-back, commanding, gesticulating, and shouting to the brigade men assembled in full force. Seeing us he cried: "The fire is near the Atagoyama. The wind is blowing full in from the bay, and if the flames don't spread over the crowded quarter close by, it will be the work of the gods. Come on, English friends, and see how the Yedo firemen can work!" So out we went, in rear of the engine-men, the hook and ladder gang, the lantern-bearers, the pailmen, and the battering-ram coolies, into the street, where a howling, rushing crowd almost swamped us in our exit.

Over the house-tops we could see the broad lurid glare, and through the driving snow we raced together with other brigades, all howling and laughing like madmen, everyone apparently treating the whole concern as if it were an excellent joke, and not a matter perhaps of life and death.

Long before we arrived we could perceive that the fire was one of no ordinary magnitude, for we met streams of shrieking, terrified old men, women, and children, laden with screens, bedding, shutters, clothes, and domestic utensils, flying for refuge anywhere away from the fire. Now and then, at a point where two streets met, a fire-brigade, dashing along at headlong speed, would tear through the ranks of these unfortunates, tumbling them over and scattering far and wide the Lares and Penates so barely rescued from the flames. But this was no time for sympathy. We rushed on, mixed with other fire-companies, and just as we were beginning to feel the effects of a sharp trot, after a heavy meal and a very hurried repose, arrived at the scene of action.

It was a big fire—there was no doubt about it. In Constantinople and New York, fairly big events of this sort occasionally occur, and are made much of; but to see King Fire in all his awful power and glory, Japan should be visited. Although we had been pretty prompt in obeying the alarm-bell, we found that the fire had already made considerable progress, and at first, unprotected as we were by helmets or hoods, we found it difficult even to look at the raging scene before us. All we could make out was a vast expanse of

dancing flame, intersected by jets of smoke, and the black outlines of burnt or burning buildings. By degrees we became accustomed, and we saw our brigade double up into action, place the engine in position, squirt at the flames, which seemed to have the most undisputed mastery everywhere, and send forward the hook and ladder men—dare-devil fellows, who seemed to have the utmost contempt for flames and falling timber, and who went into the danger as if they were going to a wedding. To us, accustomed to the stern, silent, business-like manner of the London firemen, there was something savouring of burlesque in the efforts of these Yedo brigades to combat the flames. The general effect was that of what is known as a pantomime "rally"—everyone howling, shouting, running to and fro, and upsetting one another amidst a shower of beams, tiles, and articles of furniture, without any apparent order or method. There was a great deal of movement and a great deal of uproar, and during the whole performance the flames seemed to wander just where they pleased, singeing here, blistering there, but as a rule completely gutting what they came in contact with.

Meanwhile our engine had come to utter grief. But this, to our eyes, was of very little consequence, as it had served simply to damp the jackets of the firemen; so it was removed, and all the energies of the brigade were devoted to the object of preventing the spread of the fire by the wholesale demolition of houses. With this object in view the hook and ladder men were sent forward into the houses which were more immediately threatened with destruction, whilst the battering-rams—huge piles of wood with tremendous iron forks at the ends—were run up under the charge of the most stalwart coolies of the brigade. The captain, armed with a huge standard, was sitting straddle-legged on the roof of a house, and by his movements those of the brigade were directed. Until he retreated not a man dared to dream of yielding an inch, and we trembled for the safety of our fine old friend as we saw him apparently alone in a blaze of flame, or half hidden in the dense volumes of smoke, which rose from the burning masses on all sides of him.

And here we may remark that although the discipline of the brigades, their methods of procedure, and their total unbusiness-like air of doing everything,

were to be condemned in toto, too high praise cannot be bestowed on the individual pluck and agility of the members. We in Europe are now familiar with the extraordinary feats of Japanese acrobats; but to see this skill and agility put to a practical use one should "assist" at a Yedo fire. When the word is given for the hook and ladder men to go into action, it is a treat to see some score of muscular, active-limbed young fellows, not one of whom pauses a moment to look at the danger into which he is going headlong, dash into the houses already tottering to their fall, swarm on the roofs, swing from rafter to rafter, struggle up almost perpendicular slopes of loose tiles—often with a rope in their mouths—jump over yawning chasms of flame as if they were two-foot ditches, fasten the grapnels to the blazing timbers, jump down and signal an "all right" to a gang of coolies below, who are hanging on to the chain or rope. The wall totters backwards and forwards for a minute, but extra mettle is put into a final pull, and down comes the whole blazing side of a house, burying half-a-dozen firemen, sending up a huge pillar of smoke and sparks to the sky, and calling forth a tremendous yell from the admiring crowd. Scarcely has it fallen when a dozen active fellows are hard at work with their fire-hooks. From under one heap of timbers jump out two or three of the hook and ladder men, who rub their bruises and laugh frantically. Out of a cavern of smouldering ashes crawls another, with an arm broken; whilst from the innermost recesses are pulled out two or three poor blackened, mutilated remains of what were a few minutes back rollicking dare-devils in the prime and strength of manhood. These last are gently carried off on shutters, and to-morrow will be followed to their last resting-place under the cryptomerias and azaleas on the hill-side yonder, by a crowd of relations and comrades, proud in the midst of their sorrow of the deaths met with in the public cause.

So interested and excited had we been by the extraordinary scene, that we had entirely forgotten our own selves, and by degrees we became sensible of the fact that we were over the ankles in snow slush, that whilst our faces were being scorched and blistered by the reflected heat of the fire, the wind and snow had formed a frozen coating on our backs. Apparently the fire would burn itself out unless the wind

should suddenly change, for, notwithstanding the pluck and activity of the firemen, the insufficient means at their disposal for fighting the flames, and their general want of strict discipline, were powerful allies of the enemy. The captain, standing out against the fiery background like a weird statue, still cheered and exhorted his men from the very precarious roof of a temple; the men, drenched to the skin, scorched and bruised, half worn out with continuous hewing, hauling, and clambering, still kept up the fight, retreating only as their leader retreated and howling like fiends as every house fell in, but it was of little avail. The flames did what they liked, and all efforts to stop their progress seemed powerless, so, wishing that we could transport to the scene of action a couple of steam fire-engines and some of Captain Shaw's boys to work them, we prepared to turn back to the station and finish our sleep. We were elbowing our way through the mob, when we heard a tremendous cheer—totally distinct from any of the wild howls we had listened to during the evening—a well-organised, solid British cheer, breathing beef, beer, and pluck; we stopped short, made our way to the front again, and were just in time to see a body of blue-jackets rush through the crowd, knocking over obstructives right and left, and dragging a real London-made steam fire-engine. It was like a dream to see such a sight in the heart of Yedo, and we at first imagined that they were sailors from the Japanese ships of war in the harbour, but their method of going to work disabused our minds of this notion. In very few seconds the great machine was brought to a standstill, the hose run out, and streams of water playing on the burning street, which in five minutes equalled in torrent the whole amount of water thrown during the evening by the native squirts. We then learnt that the blue-jackets were from one of her Majesty's surveying-vessels then at anchor in the bay, and that the steam fire-engine was one which had been bought by the corporation—or whatever the governing body is termed—of Yedo, some years back, when the fit for buying up in all directions every article of European origin was at its height, and which had been neglected in a shed close by the railway station ever since its arrival.

The flames were a little intimidated by their new foe, but the wind was a faithful

ally, and the officer in charge of the blue-jackets saw that no amount of water would check the spread of the fire. Besides, Jack at a fire in Japan is like a schoolboy let loose for a holiday, and there is not much fun in squirting with a hose at a safe distance; so, yielding to the generally expressed wish, the officer ordered the engine to be withdrawn, and sent the blue-jackets into the flames. I don't say that they exceeded the natives in pluck and skill, but their thorough unalloyed enjoyment of being able to go in anywhere and back as they pleased, with their keen ship's axes, led them into the most extraordinary freaks of foolhardiness that can be imagined. They were simply everywhere—tumbling over one another in their eagerness to get to an especially hot part, sliding about slippery roofs, smashing at every smashable object to be seen, without arguing for a moment whether they were doing any good, heaving furniture out of the windows, cheering, laughing, and chaffing one another without intermission.

Still the fire progressed, and the officer thinking that his men had had a good ten minutes' fun, called a council of petty officers to take serious measures. It was proposed to blow up a house or two, and thus create a gap over which the flames could not leap; the Japanese authorities were consulted, and, Japanese-like, demurred at first to such a proceeding, as being not only an innovation, but as tending rather to lower their own prestige. However, the point was gained, at a whistle the tars reappeared from various parts of the fire—singed, bruised, panting, and ragged—everyone was cleared away from the scene of action, the powder distributed in a couple of tea-houses as yet intact, and for the first time during the evening, nothing was heard but the howling of the wind and the crackle of the flames. They soon reached the devoted houses, there was a big puff, a blinding shower of sparks, a vision of falling timbers in a red atmosphere, and when all had subsided, a neat square gap was seen, at which the flames stopped short. So by the exercise of common sense, and the employment of a little powder, a catastrophe, which probably would have terminated only with the limits of the city, was averted. The fire was over, the blue-jackets formed and marched off to a lively chorus, the greater part of the mob melted away to bed and gossip, and we returned to the station.

We did not rally the captain upon the fact that, after all, his big fire had been stopped by foreigners, for we saw he was mortified, and that he felt himself humiliated in our eyes; but we complimented him heartily on his own pluck and that of his men; and the old man, when we arrived, divested himself of his battered helmet, his saturated, singed, and tattered uniform, and soon joined us in a well-earned cup of saki, previous to turning in to rest.

So ended our experiences with the Yedo firemen. On our return to Yokohama, we set to work at once, called a public meeting, sent round a subscription list, and in a few days had four good volunteer brigades in working order; so that, after all, our night at Yedo was not without beneficial results.

STRANGE WATERS.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON,

AUTHOR OF "OLYMPIA," "PEARL AND EMERALD," &c. &c.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER VIII. NOËMI'S SECOND OFFER.

It may sometimes take half a lifetime to eat a mouthful of cold fowl. The length of the operation depends entirely on what is in one's mind at the time.

Walter Gordon had, of course, heard of the caliph, who, in the moment's space between dipping his head under water, and bringing it out again, lived through not half a lifetime, but the whole of it, from the cradle to the grave; in short, through the entire circle of existence that is epitomised under three short heads in the first column of the supplement of *The Times*. He thought that Clari was eating in remarkable silence, even for her in one of her rare silent moods; no doubt she was hungry, but the use of the teeth did not, with her, hinder the use of the tongue. If he had thought of the story of the caliph, he would have found the key. But how could he, even then, in the interval between the cutting of a morsel of fowl, and its entering her lips, have read the story of Noëmi Baruc, as it acted itself in the air before her? Words take time to read, as well as to write—vivid memories outrace lightning, and know nothing of time or light.

Even while she saw herself munching nuts, and making postures before the mirror in the loft of bric-à-brac, she was also standing in a corner of the Corso among the thick of the Carnival crowd;

and the horses ran, and the moccoli gleamed like glowworms in the dark, and the flowers and the sugar-plums rained, and the diamonds flashed in the broad sun, all at once together. At the same instant of time, she was singing for a pair of visionary earrings in the shadow of the Colosseum under the moon—she was bargaining with Prosper for francs, and with her master for the purse of Fortunatus, and the empire of the world. And, not after all this, but together with it, she was—nursing a child.

It is to be feared that her master, when he married her out of hand, by way of artistic necessity, and to keep off the impresario-flies, did not take into account certain other accidents of marriage. But such accidents will happen—especially when they are least wanted. Intent upon giving the world the end of a great work, the means he had taken to ensure it had as yet only given it the beginning of another woman. Merely the beginning of one as yet—a baby in the guise of a chrysalis, with a very little face and prodigiously large brown eyes. It was, as a matter of course, swathed round as tightly and stiffly with linen bands as grown-up children are with circumstance; and its great brown eyes stared with almost grown-up wonder to find the world about it so very queer. It was a very poor substitute for the great work indeed.

The lessons had to stop, for beyond a certain point nature flatly refuses to submit to the severest system that the greatest philosopher—nay, that the greatest fool—has ever made. And suppose Noëmi was to take it into her head to turn into that most hopelessly inartistic of all creatures—a mother? The maestro knew little of such matters from experience, but he knew, theoretically, all about the maternal instinct, and how apt it is to override every other. He had never been able to conquer that unconfessed distrust of Noëmi that had driven him to marry her as the only sure means of binding her safe, in the teeth of temptation. But here was a traitor in the very citadel, whose strength was not to be measured by its present size. From all the perils of the world, the flesh, and Prosper, he had securely caged her; but against a baby—what in the name of art was he to do?

And what, in the name of nature, was Noëmi to do with a baby? She had scarcely ever touched such a thing, since she first touched herself with her own

baby-fingers, in immemorial time. No such being had ever found its way in with the sunbeams that used for an hour a day to creep through the barred windows of Il Purgatorio, who would most surely have kept against it a debtor's account for board and lodging, at compound interest, from its first birthday, and turned a penny out of its very mother's milk, somehow. Infants, otherwise than in law, were too wise to visit that special house in the Ghetto. What was Noëmi to do with such a thing?

She could love it.

And, somehow, that came to her more easily than even singing.

But as she sat and nursed her bambina at the end of its seventh week, the look on her face was as little like such a common thing as mothers' love as can well be conceived. For that matter, it was not such a look as a man would like to see in his wife's face, whether she were a mother or no. It was more like the hunger of love, than love of the sort that a woman gives either to a man or to a child. That Noëmi Barnc from the Ghetto had at last found her human soul was clear—but it looked little enough like a soul that was worth the finding.

Now it so happened that Prosper, in his search for a new star, had been disappointed bitterly. More than that, he had discovered that he had been grossly and shamefully taken in; and that wounded his amour propre, both as a Frenchman and as an impresario. Never had he been driven to admit such a thing to himself in all his life before. And by a girl, too, who had not even the right to a débutante's knowledge of business—and by a composer, forsooth, and not even a famous one; by a man whom an impresario regards as much his proper prey as a sparrowhawk regards a sparrow! And by an English composer—a nondescript kind of creature hardly to be recognised in the operatic world, while Waterloo was still something more than a forgotten tradition, and men believed in the story of Cambronne and the Old Guard! Greater than Cambronne, Prosper would neither die nor surrender; and he was bound to retrieve his dishonour. It had not been hard for him to learn that the English musician was no more married to the beautiful Jewess than she was married to him, Prosper. When the Englishman had declared himself her husband he had distinctly lied—

"Like an Englishman," said Prosper. "Perfide Albion! The idea of that ape being married to that angel! But no man shall say that he has twice made a fool of Prosper; no, if it costs me six thousand francs a week, no. She would be cheap at seven thousand; and she only asks for five."

Prosper knew his business; and not even amour propre would have had a word to say had he not honestly believed that his newly-discovered star was of the very first magnitude. And, though Il Purgatorio, for reasons of his own, had not set the police on the traces of the stolen mantilla, still they were not quite so blind as Andrew Gordon had assumed. An ugly, dwarfish man cannot travel in company with a beautiful girl wholly unobserved—when it does not occur to him that non-observation is a purchasable commodity. That season at Moscow, and elsewhere, slipped by with no new star; but Prosper held to his purpose as if he had been a bull-dog of British breed, whose teeth are within a hair's-breadth of meeting in somebody's muscle. He set out once more as *avant-courier* of the next season, crossed the Alps once more, and set himself, like both bull-dog and bloodhound, on the trail of his star.

He had run her to earth months before, and had taken care, at slight expense, to keep himself informed of where she was to be found. And now, even while she was brooding over the seven weeks' old *bambina*, he was moving along the street in her direction, and thinking of her. If much thought of a person creates sympathy even at a distance, she also ought to be thinking of him—and that was by no means impossible. For the bird in the bush of art still seemed as far away as ever; diamonds had not yet rained from those sublime skies of which her husband preached, and where he himself seemed to gather nothing but wool. True, the *bambina* had fallen from them.

At any rate her "Come in!" in answer to a tap at the door, was replied to by the re-entry of Monsieur Prosper in person. She started rather eagerly at the sight of him, and he started too, for an imperceptible moment, when his eyes fell on the *bambina*. But there was not even the shade of a moment between the start and a shrug and a smile.

"Am I too vain to hope the signorina remembers me?"

"I remember you very well," said Noëmi.

Prosper's face glowed. There was something in her voice, as well as in her face, that he had not found there last season. Even an *impresario* may recognise a soul in another, though he may have none of his own. It is part of his profession to recognise souls. They have a high market value in proportion to their rarity. He did not see the soul in question, though it was lying in the woman's lap before him plain to see, but heard it in her voice and saw it in her eyes.

"Ah! And you have not become famous yet? That is strange. But you were right, *mademoiselle*; you were right to wait for—for—something."

"Famous yet!" repeated Noëmi, with such utter scorn in her voice that Prosper was startled—for more than a moment this time.

"Signorina?"

"How should one be famous, or anything else, when one has to wait till one is old?"

"The signorina will never be old."

"I am not signorina. I am signora."

"Ah?"

"And the worse for me! I wish I had taken your one thousand francs, your five hundred—fifty, even."

"Fifty! I offer you fifty! Never, *mademoiselle*."

"I am not *mademoiselle*. I am *madame*."

"But why should you wait till you are old?"

"Because, *Corpo di Bacco*! I am to sing in a great opera—so great—so great that it will take twenty years to compose."

"Twenty years to compose an opera? Impossible, *mademoiselle*. Why I, Prosper, could compose one in twenty days. Twenty years—only to compose! How long will it take to perform, then? Who is it composes an opera in twenty years?"

"My husband."

"Ah! But pardon me; is it necessary you should wait twenty years for your *début*? Twenty years is much in a woman's life, be she ever so charming. She grows fat, or she grows thin. And twenty years of salary—"

"I do not sing for money—I sing for Art—*Corpo d'un Cane*!"

"For Art? I do not understand, *mademoiselle*. You mean you are an amateur?"

The girl was a Roman Jewess, be it remembered, with diamonds in her heart, and her heart on her tongue; reticence is not a southern virtue.

"I mean I am to wait twenty years, till I am ugly and old, before I sing some stupid swine-music that will make people put their fingers in their ears. That is Art, signor."

"What horror! And monsieur—what a man!"

"He loves his swine-music; he does not even love the bambina." And she bent her whole self over the child in one moment's caress, so that it was wonderful the little human chrysalis did not snap in two. "Yes, he went over the world to find someone whom he might break into singing his opera. And he found me."

"You mean he is keeping you for his opera? And for twenty years? It ought to be a fine work, mademoiselle, when it comes."

"It is hideous, monsieur—music to make one creep and shudder, like hearing them grind a saw. He brought it to me yesterday. 'Now,' he said, 'let me hear you sing. This is to be your glory and mine.' Ah, if you could only see it, monsieur—just one bar! But I sang, for I can sing, and I saw the light come into his face as I had never seen it before. And then I said, 'The time has come, then?' Think, monsieur, that was what I was waiting for; the stage and the lights and the flowers, and to hear myself singing the hearts out of people's mouths and the francs out of their purses. 'When am I to sing this? And our fortune begins?'"

"And he—"

"He said, 'In twenty years you will be at your best; I shall take care to finish this in just twenty years.' Believe it, monsieur, I am to wait twenty years till I am old, and then he says that the people will hate his work for years, and perhaps not find it out till we are dead and gone—but that it is all for Art. That is what Art means, monsieur. I thought it meant diamonds for the bambina when she is a young girl, and it means—it means—to be the slave of a craze, and to starve."

"What infamy!"

"Indeed, infamy!"

"Ah, I comprehend—I am not a fool. You are charming. You sing like an angel," said Prosper, enthusiasm mounting his climax like a ladder. "You would make nine thousand francs a week—ten thousand. You are ambitious; you have fire; you have soul, mademoiselle. You throw yourself away on an imbecile—on a—"

"Monsieur, my husband is a great

man," said Noëmi, simply, and with inconsistent pride after all her scorn.

"Mademoiselle, I said it—a great fool. Ah, I know him! I have known a man in Vienna who went without a meal for one whole day because he would not write what he did not like—as if the art of arts were not the art of living, mademoiselle! Were we born to starve? One hundred thousand thunders, no!" Enthusiasm had reached the highest rung.

At least it seemed so. But there was yet one more.

"I will marry you myself, mademoiselle. I, Prosper!"

It was true passion—truer, maybe, than love knows aught of. Every impresario, like every astronomer, glories in finding a new star; but if he can save her salary, or rather pay it into his own pocket, then he is in the impresario's heaven, where stars shine as cheaply as the diamonds of astronomy.

Noëmi shrugged her shoulders. "I am married—to Art," she said bitterly.

Prosper had as much imagination as an impresario. And therefore he understood Noëmi skindeep, but that thoroughly. She must be really married, after all—no chain but the very strongest could suffice to chain one in whom he began to suspect the soul of a caged but untamed tigress, hungry for diamonds. And in that case he could not save her salary in the way he proposed. But there are more ways of killing a dog than hanging him—more ways of getting a prima donna for nothing than marrying her. The Italian style is to engage her at a high figure, and then to abscond on the eve of pay-day. But that, in other countries, is esteemed sharp practice, and Prosper was no rogue. It simply occurred to him that, when a woman is married to a man who will not let her sing, it is safe to offer her any terms she asks, and then, when she asks for settlement, to give her any terms one pleases, on the score that a contract made by a married woman without her husband's authority is null and void. It was only an idea, a scrap of legal knowledge—but it might have its value.

"Madame," he said emphatically, "the divinest right of woman is to rebel. What you tell me is an infamy—a horror—a very great pity. Madame. You shall sing this night at the San Gennaro. You shall take the world by storm—by surprise. This night, madame. There is no word like now. I shall hear you—it matters not

how you succeed, but you must have sung in Italy, and the journals will say all you need. Then you shall go to Moscow, and you shall have ten thousand francs a week, madame, and all else that you will."

Noëmi's whole soul came into her eyes—but she said not a word.

For the second time had all her heart's desire come to her in the person of Prosper. A wise man—or woman—may throw away a single chance, but only a fool throws away a second. Every word she had said to Prosper was true. She had followed her master on the road to the glory of the world, and had found, all in one bitter moment, that its goal was martyrdom.

How was she, the poor, uninstructed girl from the Ghetto, with a soul all one carnival maze of desires—unknown love, untried passion, longing for the fulness of life, eagerness for joy—to sympathise with one iota of the ambition of the man who had no thought of wealth, who despised personal fame, who lived and breathed only for the glory of Art which she had only been able to mistranslate into roses and diamonds? No wonder she felt that she had been trapped on the Corso, to be trained for a victim on the altar of an incomprehensible idol. Not an instinct in her but rebelled against the immolation of life, youth, and beauty for the sake of the craze of a man who was scarce so much to her as the father of the bambina, who monopolised all her love because there was no other creature on earth to claim one fibre of her heart. Had he not lured her on, by false pretences, till there only lay before her a life-long sacrifice of her whole all-demanding self to a man who had only married her, as she now knew, to make her subjection more complete and her bondage more sure? Only that morning she had learned what her doom was to be—a Barmecide feast, with a dessert of Dead Sea apples. All the forenoon she had been brooding over the bambina. And now the gate was opened she had only to pass out and be free. A marvellous great longing came upon her to turn the weapons of Art wherewith her master had armed her, his supreme cultivation of her supreme gift, to her own glory—to disappoint his desire even as he had disappointed hers. An eye for an eye was still a tradition in

the Ghetto. Gratitude? She owed him none. What gratitude could she owe to a man who had tricked her into wasting herself for twenty years in order at the end to force music only fit for screech-owls into unwilling and unprofitable ears? She had nothing to thank him for but a fraud.

"Ten thousand francs a week, and all you will," repeated the tempter.

She looked at the bambina. Was she to go without so much as a pair of diamond earrings to her grave? She panted, she hesitated, she did not make up her mind. One cannot make up what is already made. She had no need to say "yes." "Yes" said itself, without words. One day's notice was not much; but Prosper, of all men, knew the need of not letting an iron cool before striking, and plumed himself upon working miracles. He knew the grand secret—promise much and pay little; but let that little be hard cash, paid on the nail. So far as Noëmi was concerned, no miracle was to be performed at all. Such a voice and such an ear, trained by Andrew Gordon, were ready, at three hours' notice, to sing the music of the spheres, let alone the music of any mortal opera, well enough to purchase the praise of all the journals in Italy.

So much for the morning. In the afternoon her master read in the Gazette an announcement of the début of a new soprano at the Theatre San Gennaro—Mademoiselle Clari.

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